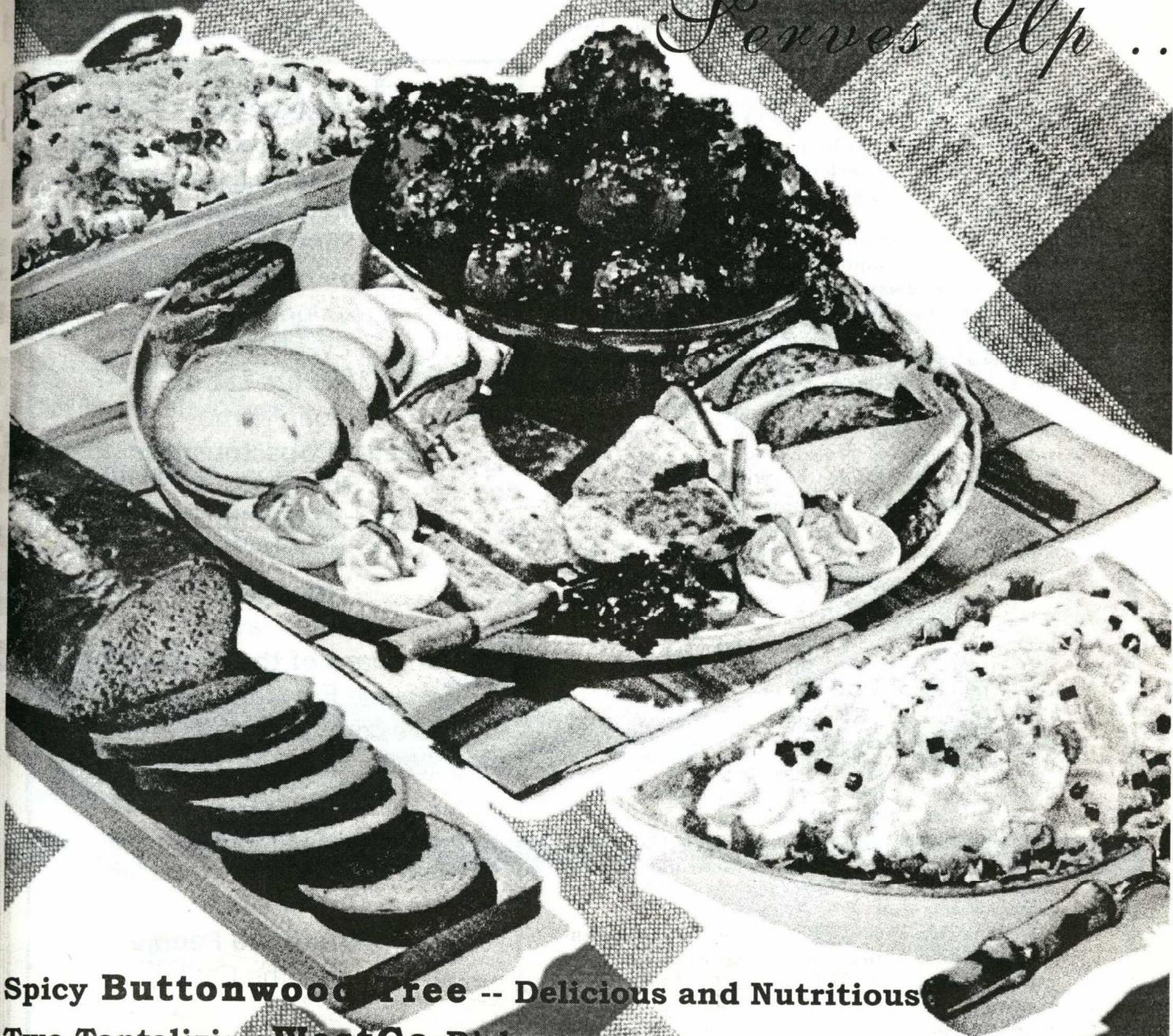


FEBRUARY, 1997

HERMES

WESLEYAN'S MAGAZINE OF POLITICAL, CRITICAL, AND CREATIVE THOUGHT

Perves Up . . .



Spicy Buttonwood Tree -- Delicious and Nutritious

Two Tantalizing WestCo Dishes

Cookies, Muffins, & Food Not Bombs: Perfect Party Treats

And Much, Much More . . .

CAMPUS DIARY

Police mugshots of Wesleyan students have not yet been in the Argus this semester. So far there have not been any pictures of open mouths close to bullhorns nor the accompanying fist in the air. But no need for alarm.

An initial lack of massive, noisy activism this semester is no excuse to mourn ourselves into apathy and despair; rather, this is reason to open our eyes and see that activism is not confined to screaming into a bullhorn, fist in the air, blocking traffic, and landing in jail.

Catchy chants and 700 people can be an effective holler to effect change, but not all activism has to be so loud. Already the first weeks of the semester have rocked with bullhornless, effective activism at Wesleyan.

A giant, fake, ugly nuclear storage cask in front of Olin, for example, is plenty loud, plenty effective. There was no need to have someone in front of the cask yelling, "I'm a nuclear waste cask and I'm evil." That would be old news.

Rather, the cask alone encouraged (scared) people to learn more about nuclear waste. E3 organized a meeting hosted by anti-nuclear activists/experts. And thanks to the inanimate fiberglass cask, the meeting was well-attended. Thus students were informed and motivated further.

Some of the students who left the meeting wrote letters to their senators against dangerous nuclear legislation. Some students put on fake radiation suits, hopped in a car with the fake cask on the trailer and stopped around Connecticut passing out anti-nuclear literature. Some students are organizing an anti-nuclear campaign at Wesleyan. But where are the bullhorns?

And what's this? Six people outside of the campus center holding up signs in different languages saying "Everyone has a right to clean air." How wimpy. Where are the gutteral death-metal chants that only massive amounts of people can achieve?

After week one of the clean air campaign, E3 has gotten 140 people to write letters to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) about strengthening clean air standards. That's darn effective: students learn about air quality; the EPA feels more inclined to strengthen clean air standards.

On the same day that E3 kicked off its clean air campaign, Students for a Free Tibet launched a letter-writing campaign to Vice President Al Gore, urging him to help free a Tibetan political prisoner. 100 postcards were sent.

Later that week, USLAC was exchanging valentines for donations to the labor movement. The weekend before, UJAMAA, BWC, and BLB kicked off Black History Month by bringing in speaker and activist Sister Souljah. Souljah uncontestedly gave apathy two thumbs down. I do too.

Effecting change is not a one-track mission. Mass protests are one path, but we need to get out of the rut

of waxing nostalgic for the olden days where mass political action was supposedly a daily occurrence and was always effective.

Frankly, I don't want students to dismiss activism as something for extroverts, or as something defined by a generation. The only common bond is a commitment to effecting change. How you transform that commitment into action is based on you.

We should not wait for the next mass protest to turn around and say that Wesleyan is redeemed, that the apathetic conservative vibe has not succeeded. We should not wait for anything.

—John Kamp



HERMES

Drops the "collective" idea and embraces scientific socialism

Production

Sarah Wilkes

Means of Production

Aongus Burke

Eyal Perlsom

Surplus Labor

John Kamp

False Consciousness

Thad Domina

Class Consciousness

Dan Young

Hegemony

Laura Clawson

Vanguard of the Proletariat

Brian Edwards-Tiekert

Executive Committee of the Bourgeoisie

Emily Katz

Janet Han

Livia Gershon

Idealogical State Apparatus

Trevor Griffey

Opiate of the People

Bob the Cat

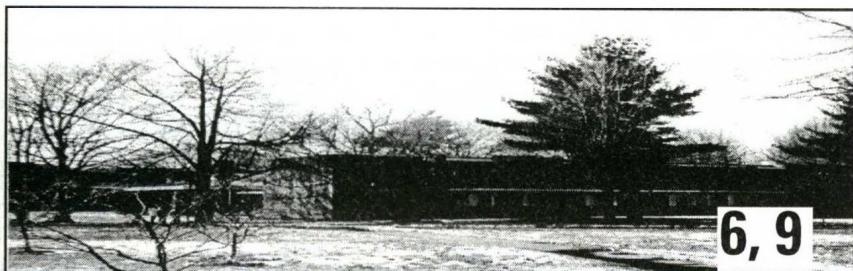
All opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Hermes staff.

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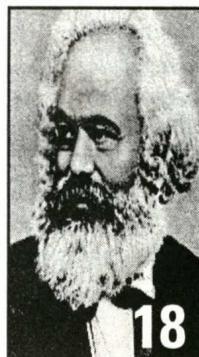
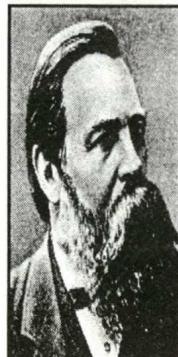
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Cover collage by Emily Katz and Thad Domina





Letters Letters Letters

Dear Trevor Griffey:

I too love drugs, however I'm not sure why you insist that we would be a better country if we were all on them. You say that you were "raised like millions of Americans—without serious commitment to anything in particular, without real appreciation of [your] own or others' existence..." so if people were to be raised with such appreciation and respect for life then we wouldn't need to feed them drugs. A movement to introduce spirituality into schools and to create a stigma around letting one's children be raised by nannies seems to be more aimed at the goal you discuss than legalizing hallucinogens. I would really like to hear your response to all this, and I must admit that I'm a little jealous of you, for although I don't need to be on drugs to experience the joy and wonder of other people and life, when I'm on drugs I usually just sit around and watch my screen saver...

—Jennifer Dorman

Trevor Griffey responds:

I am sorry that you seemed to have misread my piece, or that I was unclear, or both. You seemed to have read my hopes correctly in talking about problems with spiri-

I never explicitly said that large groups of people SHOULD do drugs, though I see how you could infer it

tuality in this country. But it doesn't seem that you understood what I hoped would be clear in the beginning of my last paragraph—that it was for the best that we DO NOT have another Tim Leary; that ritual and all other non-drug induced forms of ego effacement which bring about a state of purposeless and wonderful being are

better than drugs—they are less disorienting, probably more healthy, certainly less expensive, and come from one's self rather than something out of one's control, like drugs.

The point which I hoped to make clear, which I guess I didn't, was that in a society where most people don't dance or sing or pray, in a hateful and fearful place with little reflection on death, with short attention spans and infinite addictions (drugs included), people often

Certain hallucinogenic drugs can, I believe, for some people, show them that a better path exists when they themselves are unwilling to show themselves another one.

aren't willing or can't let down their guard. They can't appreciate the world around them and set themselves up with meaningless and mildly entertaining tasks instead. And certain hallucinogenic drugs can, I believe, for some people, show them that a better path exists when they are unwilling to show themselves another one.

But that is all drugs can do—and that is one of the major reasons that other methods are so much better. Drugs cannot show what path might be better for the reason that one's agency in creating the drug experience is basical-

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does it for us. They can have a value (the point I most wanted to make in my article), but their value is limited (a point I should have made more clear).

I never explicitly said that large groups of people SHOULD do drugs, though I see how you could infer it. In fact, I do not think I offered any concrete solutions to

the problem of humankind's current self-destructive and unhappy state—drug induced or not.

I bemoaned the decline of a popular notion which could counter the more prevalent idea that all drugs are bad under all circumstances, and found it ironic that hateful people would hate something that makes people unhatful and harms no one. To say these things, I first had to say that drugs can be a great experience, which I believe. I'm sorry that it was mis-

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the only great experience, or are what this country really needs.

I would be willing to talk about bringing religion into schools in a way that was inoffensive and did not breach the First Amendment, or deemphasizing babysitters and TV, but that is beyond the scope of my article, and not something I either disregarded or addressed.

Thanks for your response.

—Trevor Griffey

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I enjoyed the November issue—especially Garrick Wahlstrand's article on Jon Barlow and his new educational initiative. I was turned on to Barlow in Music 101, which he taught at the time with Dick Winslow. Barlow has stuck with me ever since. I would strongly endorse anything he's involved with. In the same issue, Aongus Burke's essay in resignation, "Why We Don't Vote," inspired me to write a short article for Hermes [see following page], which I hope you will run whenever you have some space available.

In solidarity,
Alan J. Saly, '79

PEOPLE ARE PROFITS

Political and social responsibility, then and now



After reading Aongus Burke's thoughtful essay in the November issue of *The Hermes*, "Why We Don't Vote: Postmodern Electoral Apathy," I thought I would

a response by Alan Saly, class of 1979

attempt to cut to the chase and write down some thoughts as a former *Hermes* staffer who has gone on to work in the labor movement for nine years. Activism, indeed, isn't easy. Pop culture is indeed a powerful siren's song that drowns most people's attempts to be socially responsible. I agree with Burke that America atomizes. The individual is less important in public life. As a society, we are now in a time of government for and by pressure groups.

But it is hard for me not to be disturbed by Burke's last sentence, in which he says that the growth of

"non-voting" may be "a sign of a healthy democracy." The issue is, if we are not involved,

then who is making the decisions? The short answer is business interests—the marketplace. Multinational corporations and the media are putting in place a seamless web, where a brutal truth is being obscured by the haze of popular culture and entertainment—people are becoming commodities.

Nothing is being done about US and world population growth, which is out of control. Within fifty years, America may have a population of 450 million—200

million more than we have now. Business interests actively encourage population growth, even as the numbers of good jobs decline, due to jobs being shipped overseas and

technological changes that render old jobs obsolete. More people mean more income for Time-Warner, Mobil, Mitsubishi, and the rest. More people are more consumers, more people who need health care, more people to build prisons for and to incarcerate, more people to crowd casinos, buy cars, liquor and cigarettes. The problem is that the chance for a sustainable and environmentally aware society is being lost in the process.

When I took part in direct political action back at Wes Tech, sitting on the floor of President

I believe that, unless people get more active, more socially responsible, and more willing to challenge established interests, we are heading towards a time in which the state will arrogate more and more responsibility for citizens' lives to itself

Campbell's office as we protested university investments in South Africa, we had some chants and posters that we often used. "People Before Profits" was a general theme. I see it differently now. People are profits. While people enjoy their torpor and their TV, business interests are moving towards an integrated global economy, where profit is primary and ethical considerations are marginalized by public relations firms.

I believe that, unless people

get more active, more socially responsible, and more willing to challenge established interests, we are heading towards a time in which the state will arrogate more

and more responsibility for citizens' lives to itself. Rationing of health care will continue until specific dollar amounts are placed on human lives. We will see state sponsored euthanasia and selective abortion by legislation. Biotechnology companies are already harvesting fetal tissue and organs. How long until fetuses themselves are grown and harvested for organs—before people themselves are bought and sold?

Big business, and even big labor, tend to exploit people—most basically by demanding more and more people to consume and produce. The big picture—the need for a sustainable society, where there are limits to growth—is lost

in the shuffle. When Burke sees conflict diminishing in our society, he should reflect upon the now obsolete '70s slogan, "People before profits." Maybe soon there will be a new store opening down the block—"People R Us." Arlo Guthrie said, "You can get anything you want at Alice's restaurant, except for Alice." Now you can even get Alice.



The author is the Assistant to the President and Vice President of Local 2507, District Council 37, AFSCME, representing the EMTs and Paramedics of the New York City Fire Department.



DESPERATELY SEEKING WEST CO

Where did the "community" go?

BY BRIAN EDWARDS-TIEKERT

When I decided to attend Wesleyan last year, I'd already decided on housing. I wanted to live in West College. The idea of a dorm with a purpose, a gathering place for unconventional people, a hotbed of creativity and activism, was what appealed to me. I wanted to live in a place where 120 people worked together to make an institutional cinder block compound into a community.

In fact, the abundance of affinity and special interest housing at Wesleyan was one of the things that attracted me to this school. Out House, Art House, Open House, German House, French House, Japan House, Womanist House, Earth House—few other schools have anything remotely comparable. Any university that goes so far to encourage community, diversity, identity, and activism—even in the living environment—made it to the top of my charts.

You can imagine my surprise when I got my housing forms in the mail. There was no mention of West Co as being any different from any other freshman dorm. About the best thing the catalogue could say was that it was "centrally located." Objectively, this placed it slightly lower than Hewitt, whose "extensive" recreational facilities were described glowingly. I knew about West Co; I'd stayed there twice. Residents described its function and its nature to me, and if no two explanations were in precise agreement, they made up for their discrepancy in shared affection. Why wouldn't the university advertise a place that had so much appeal for students?

Furthermore, what had happened to the application? I was sure that I'd been told you have to apply to get into West Co; it didn't make sense that something like WestCo could function any other way. "Maybe they mail a separate application once you list it as your first choice," I thought as I wrote a 1 in the box next to the words "Foss 1-4: West College." My conception of utopian life at college rested so firmly on living in West Co that I started telling my friends and parents how wonderful it was before I even found out if I'd gotten in. When the university mailed me a letter assigning me to a place I'd never heard of, 100

Howland, I was pretty upset. I was obviously blowing things out of proportion, but a little thing like starting college by spending a year somewhere you don't want to live can be disconcerting.

Of course, I was relieved to find out that 100 Howland was West Co when I got here; what disturbed me was that West Co wasn't West Co anymore.

I remember spending time in the West Co cafe when I visited. The room was full of pleasant clutter, and I drew my conclusions accordingly. There was playfulness in the stacked-up board games; the defaced television and the stuffed animals hanging from the ceiling spoke of an aesthetic sense of humor; the piles of second-hand books spoke to the intellectual

climate and the sharing spirit of this place; the community's history was recorded in the graffiti on the walls and the many decades' accumulation of bric-a-brac.

Seeing the cafe cleaned out and sanitized, violated by the clumsy hand of Physical Plant, the decades of clutter swept away and disposed of, the community



"WestCo" or "West Clark"? West College needs an identity

turned into nothing more than a cold, institutional basement... This was only one of the surprises I faced when I arrived at my idealized dorm. Freshmen on my hall had no idea that West Co was any different from Nicolson or Hewitt. Every upperclassman I talked to seemed convinced that "West Co sucks this year, man!"

West Co sophomores told us that to be a part of West Co you had to break into the tunnels, take acid on Duke Day, and steal stuff. Ominous words like "re-appraisal" floated through our Guidance sessions, and the "Disorientation" issue of *Hermes* carried a four-page article detailing the administration's systematic attack on affinity and specialized housing. It carried a picture of figures representing East Co, WestCo, Eclectic, and X-House tied against an execution wall. East Co had been shot; ResLife's gun, still smoking, was pointed at West Co.

Why?

Why should the school shoot itself in the foot by fighting specialized housing, one of its most progressive, appealing, and broadly supported institutions? Why should it target WestCo? Why does WestCo suck?

You could say that the administration started targeting special interest housing back in 1992, when a special committee on university housing policy presented a proposal for the future of housing. The proposal included abolishing all special-interest housing, selling In Town, mandating that all students live in on-campus housing, abolishing

East Co, WestCo, and Eclectic, building a new dorm on the corner of Williams St. and High St., and forcing people to stay in the same housing unit, or 'cluster' for all four years of their time at Wesleyan. The 'cluster' system was conceived to create diverse (read: homogeneous) communities in our supposedly fragmented campus. Each cluster would cover all four years of students, would be affiliated with a particular department, and would promote mandatory community events; all of this would be enforced by the administration.

In other words: the proposal would replace student-run communities that cover a wide area of interests with communities limited to representing academic interests, communities that are planned, instituted, and enforced by the administration.

The proposal was rejected in the face of massive student resistance, but the anti-autonomy approach the administration took toward student housing has remained a presence in campus policies over the last four years. EastCo, already weak, dissolved. The number of students with off-campus status has been cut in half. X-House had its autonomy challenged last year when former Dean of Student Life Denise Darrigrand chose to arbitrarily violate its policy of maintaining an all-black community. Eclectic has been attacked through neglect: its kitchen has been condemned since early 1989, nearly half its rooms leak when it rains, and two Februaries ago its boiler blew up because of substandard maintenance. With the cost of renovating 200 High Street estimated at up to \$1.5 million, the university will apparently run the house into the ground if it can't starve out Eclectic. And last year, as a result of the regular three-year appraisal process, WestCo was stripped of its application process and Res Life literature was changed to omit any description that distinguished WestCo from any other dorm, effectively revoking its status as affinity housing. Why?

Admittedly, last year's West Co would probably have fallen almost as far short of my pre-frosh fantasies as this year's. The general consensus among residents and ex-residents is that WestCo as a community has been on the decline for a number of years. This

perceived decline has involved a decrease inactivity, creativity and more important, a loss of the sense of community, openness, intimacy, and unity with fellow residents.

Last year, WestCo didn't have enough applicants to fill the dorm. When, during the course of last year's appraisal, Res Life solicited responses as to why WestCo should continue to be distinct from other dorms, it received so few replies that it interpreted the widespread silence as tacit acceptance of the end of WestCo.

This gradual "decline" can be attributed to many factors. For instance, in the early '90s much of the decision-making power in processing applications to WestCo was usurped from resident-elected presidents by Res Life. Since then, Res Life has tried to diversify WestCo every year by placing some people there that don't want to be, and by placing people that want to live in WestCo in other dorms.

Some factors are physical: The closing of the kitchen area in the West Co Cafe years ago impacted the types of activities West Co could host. In keeping with the living/learning environment it was originally intended to be, West Co used to host faculty dinners on a monthly basis in the cafe. Today, the space is only suitable for hosting bands and the occasional comedy troupe. The expansion of Weshop in 1994 (against the recommendation of the Student Dining Committee) cut Foss 1 off from the rest of West Co, leaving it in a limbo of geography and community that earned it the nickname "West Clark."

Others factors are more connected to the state of Wesleyan in general. Many upperclassmen perceive the school as becoming more conservative as the years pass by; the state of WestCo could simply be symptomatic of larger trends. Still other factors are demographic: In a dorm setting like WestCo, even the most active and involved individuals have a residency life span of about two years. This makes it harder to maintain traditions, increases the possibility of lulls in student activity, and makes it harder to organize prolonged resistance to Res Life.

What we need to question is the role that Res Life should play in regards to special-interest and affinity housing. When student-run communities like West Co hit low points, is it the place of the administration to target and dismantle them, or to help nurse them back to health, or neither? It seems counter-intuitive for Res Life to dismantle autonomous communities and then spend time and resources developing new ones controlled by the administration (like in the clusters proposal) that the students don't want in the first place.

What's the problem with special interest housing as it stands? It's hard to say. The rationale behind it is pretty strong: Put a bunch of people with a common

interest in one place and together they'll learn more about that interest and do more for the larger campus community than they would as isolated individuals. And it works out—at a school of three thousand we have more activities and more diversity of activity on a given weekend than many larger schools see in a week. Our houses organize food co-ops, swing dancing lessons, student film festivals, poetry slams, theme parties, concerts, discussion sessions, solstice celebrations, and anything else you've seen a flyer for.

There seems to be one universal complaint against specialized housing, that it leads to a certain self-segregation. In other words, when people split along interest lines, they sometimes split along racial, gender, and sexual lines as well. There's no doubt that identity housing like X-House can draw minorities out of the rest of the population to a small extent, but do we need to force residential integration when minorities have distributed themselves according to

interest rather than prejudice or fear? A common accusation against West Co is that because of its hippy-ish reputation and the draw from X-House and I-House, it's earned the nickname "White Co." Is that a justification for the dismantling of West Co, or can we work within West Co to attract a broader cross section of active and involved students? By dismantling various identity and special-interest houses, would we in effect be substituting the appearance of multi-culturalism for the genuine thing?

Progress Report

Currently, West Co's managed to hold onto most of its old structure. It's still run by student-elected presidents instead of the unit councils that make decisions for every other dorm. It still holds regular coffee-houses and trademark events like Duke Day and Zonker Harris Day, however scaled down they are from the campus-wide events they used to be. New ideas keep coming through Monday night Guidance;

and while some of these —like getting a pinball machine for the cafe—sound like trying to make West Co more like Hewitt (with its "extensive" rec room), they're indicative of a real desire for community building, a drive to do something collectively. Activities that West Co has followed through on during the re-appraisal have included funding speakers, booking bands, and establishing a regular open mike poetry reading.

Real efforts to build a community have primarily involved developing the cafe as a more usable common space. Having an area like that, a place to gather and a place to stage events, is vital to having an active community. Head Resident Clemens Muller-Landau suggests that, among other things, the space be offered to groups like Ujamaa and Ajua-Campos as a meeting-place, to bring a more diverse, multicultural spirit to West Co, and to provide those groups with a stable location. West Co members have bought up used furniture for the cafe, installed a pool table, put up new murals, and petitioned to have the cafe put on a regular cleaning schedule. By the end of Spring Break, the kitchen area in the cafe should be open and in service; used spotlights from the theater department will be set up for the stage, and physical plant will have provided more furniture.

All of which means that West Co will be a very normal dorm with a very nice cafe if it doesn't come out of the re-appraisal with its application process and catalogue description back. So far there's been absolutely no contact from Res Life on the state of the Re-Appraisal. In fact, nobody in the administration seems to know anything at all about the Re-Appraisal. HR Clemens Muller-Landau has sent packages of filled-out questionnaires and letters from residents who want to keep West Co West Co, but there has been no response.

If the re-appraisal fails then West Co as we know it will cease to exist. It will be another victory in the quest against student-run housing. It will be a victory for the practice of administration-managed housing. Who knows who will be next?

If West Co wants to maintain its autonomy, it has to prove itself an active community distinct from the other dorms. Residents must continue to prove themselves through the activities they sponsor and the actions they take. Most importantly, supporters of West Co need to organize, to cajole Res Life into passing the re-appraisal, and to raise hell if it doesn't.



WestCo courtyard in times of a stronger sense of community



Rhapsody in Brownstone

Reflections on West College



My sister lives in an old monastery. No, she is not a temptress of monks; she is merely a student at Oberlin College residing in a converted historic building. As a freshman in Asia House, a special-interest dorm, she sleeps a few steps away from a sitting room whose

slanted ceiling, known variously as a hippie house,

frescoed in delicate patterns and buttressed by carved wood beams, peers down from lofty heights upon a conglomeration of antique chairs and walnut tables. Nearby there is a wood-paneled library graced with gorgeous murals in bold colors, and an old-fashioned dining room with battalions of solid high-backed thrones. My sister has a commanding view from her window of an elegant courtyard and a graceful loggia (saints and gargoyles hide among its finely-proportioned arches).

a punk-rock breeding ground,

During my first two years at college I lived in a corrosive trash-heap. Cigarette burns adorned the orange carpet in the hallway outside my door. Several distinguished graffiti artists had left an array of their best works in both exposed and secret places. The building's peculiar aroma, a vague but pungent blend of smoke, mildew, and general rot, burrowed into my clothes and could not be coaxed out by any means as long as I lived there. In short, it was West Co. I loved it.

Stripped of all a Sassy fashionfest, legendary

associations, West College is simply a dormitory, technically known as Foss 1-4 (it was named WestCo during its stint as a Living and Learning experiment). It comprises two units, named (but rarely called) Andrus and Howland. Built in 1957, WestCo shares Foss Hill with her sisters, Nicolson and Hewitt. All three are collections of rectangular blocks, faced with stone and punctuated by neat rows of large, unfettered windows.

Stretches of balcony and flat roofs accent the buildings' horizontality. The Foss Hill Dorms initiated a new architecture at Wesleyan and, with it, an enlightened attitude toward student life. This nascent philosophy expounded that students, finally able to move

b y E m i l y K a t z

and breathe, might flower into creative individuals and actually enrich the college body.

Reclining, low and broad, in the shadow of that old brownstone battleship, Clark Hall, West Co appears modest, open, and rather motel-like. The main entrance, recognizable by its sloping metal roof and massive central chimney, is situated in the belly of the roughly J-

shaped complex, away from the street. You approach by a wide walkway, which meanders from the bottom of a small hill, passes a stone-and-grass courtyard (defined on three sides by WesShop and Fosses 2 and

a drug den,

3) to the left, and then curves past the entrance steps and Unit 4. The main lounge perches here between 3 and 4, looking out across a gentle, sandy slope of land.

Following the broken line of its walls or traversing the site's open spaces, the dorm unfolds as a swathe of angles, projections, and voids. In contrast with a staid barracks like Lo-Rise, West College shifts, turns, and stretches. Neither Nicolson, clumpy as a stack of boxes, nor Hewitt, with its unrelenting stone courtyard and sterile countenance, compares with

a nerd haven,

West Co's fluidity and openness. The difference is accidental, necessitated (fortuitously) by Foss Hill's capricious topography. West Co alone fulfills architect Charles H Warner, Jr.'s wish that the Foss Hill dorms be "a personal reflection of the site and surrounding environment."

Whatever the partially accidental circumstances of its birth, once assembled, the dormitory's fate was sealed. Known variously as a hippie house, a drug den, a punk-rock breeding ground, a nerd haven, a Sassy fashionfest, West Co was (and still is) buckling under the alleged weight of every ethos under the sun. It is simultaneously all and none of these things; something about the very structure of this rambling motel, with its unexpected corners and vast views, is magically amorphous.

After staying there for two years, I've come to believe that

West College is no ordinary place. It is a breathing stone and glass organism, whose skin enclosed, for me, a dream universe.

So what made West Co so remarkable? Its dirt? Yes, partly. Those of us who lived there were prescient enough to notice that other dorms were not



so ragged and filthy. Nicolson and Hewitt are lavished with the same redundant spectrum of browns, but *our* paint was peeling off and grafittied-over. At some point, the university chose to forget that West Co existed, and it moldered in the shade for years while her vain stepsisters were given facelifts and makeovers.

Within the first few hours at our new home, we West Co freshmen intuitively felt that we were dwelling in a vast borderland. It was as if we had discovered a giant playhouse in the woods, abandoned but alive with echoes. We inherited this rambling complex, with its open spaces and its dark hidden caverns; We were told where we weren't to go, but knew also that doors were made for unlocking and balconies were built for climbing. The building told us so.

Sometimes it spoke in whispers, offering itself to us as a ready set-piece for whatever adventures we could think up. Aching to express ourselves as articulate adults but feeling the wild anarchic pull of childhood, West Co existed for us as a liminal playground, a crumbling Eden hovering outside the parameters of normal life (which consisted, we sensed, both of what was expected of us and what we had left behind).

The ubiquitous balcony was the stage for much of our role-playing. I remember decadent early autumn afternoons, spent lazing on the Down 3 balcony with my hallmates. Fanning ourselves and attending to the falling leaves, we murmured and sighed like old Southern ladies. We gossiped and sipped tea and reflected on life. Then, without warning, our verandah would transform into a jungle gym, swarming with legs and arms, our railing a launching pad for spidery acrobats who, moments before, were perfect country aristocrats. Earnest lovers climbed here too, clambering up through the white bars to steal kisses and scurry back into the night.

While the balcony bred exhibitionism, other places fostered quiet, private moments. From time to time I would perch beside the huge window in my room, for those ugly box-like radiators were also window-seats. On snowy winter nights, warm and cold pulling at me from different directions, I would rest my cheek against the glass and draw in the white-washed landscape. I was invisible in the dark room.

Secret adventures lay around forgotten corners and under the ground. It was possible to stumble upon whole rooms, empty and waiting. That overgrown basement, resting in suffused light, slumbered in dusty silence until my friend and I indulged a fantasy and dressed her up as the Night Rainbow cafe. A few steps away, West Co's infamous tunnels twist and seethe. Its walls, tattooed in decades-old layers of

paintings, words, and cryptic splatterings, constrict and expand according to some inexplicable logic. The building's essence dwells here, where reality dissolves in exploding color and flickering light. The tunnels made my brain whirl, dreamlike; in the being's intestines I felt the unspent thoughts and feelings from above pressing downward and bouncing off the narrow walls. The cafe itself, according to many, had its own affectionate ghost; those who whiled away nights in that subterranean womb discovered that buildings sometimes think and breathe. That's what this one was built to do.

The building is and was and always will be different. My personal memories are colored with dirt; the grimy West Co I knew was a mutinied pirate ship. Since then, though, the university has pinched the old girl's cheeks, cleaned and primped her. Small physical changes, however much they dampen my ex-West Co-president's nostalgia, will not destroy the whole. How many people now know or care, for instance, that students living on the first-floor hall of Unit 2 sleep

where an open colonnade once stood? Although the university sacrificed an unobstructed flow of space

through the building and into the courtyard, at least the hall retains its connective role between different units.

Similarly, few remember the West Co that existed before WesShop violently severed a limb from the heretofore cohesive body. Once home to the smaller East Lounge, then divided into the original WesShop and a connecting artery, the finally expanded convenient store consumed the entire joint between Units 1 and 2 like a cancer. Despite this butchering, the organism is, for the most part, resilient.

The college body seems destined to be amnesiac; every year another class graduates, inevitably carrying away strands of history. Meanwhile, a fresh pool of memories gestates in the remote consciousness of Wesleyan's newest minds. The cafe's already been reimagined by the next generation of West Co citizens, and I can't say I'm anxious to see the changes. The incarnation I knew is gone. I try to comfort myself, though, by trusting the innate, organic playfulness of the place. Let her shape your imagination. Break into the tunnels, host a slumber party on the roof, lather the cafe in whipped cream and marshmallows. The administration doesn't want you to, but the building does. Contiguous with its very structure, the soul of West College will preside benevolently over Foss Hill as long as the building still stands. Wallowing in its disgusting betrayal of students' autonomy, the present administration must be constantly shamed by this eloquent reminder of past promises.



Center for the Humanities Talks

—Not Just for the Brown-nosers Anymore—

By Laura Clawson

Just about every Monday night, professors, some students (who my friends allege to be grievous brown-nosers), and the occasional unknown weird person gather at Russell House to attend the Center for the Humanities lecture series. And OK, so I'm one of those alleged brown-nosers. I don't, however, embrace the charge, and I'd like to take this opportunity to tell my friends to go fuck themselves.

The Center for the Humanities holds probably the most regular lecture series on campus, with lectures by faculty fellows who teach only one class during their semester at the Center, but attend all the lectures and colloquia as well as presenting their own work; research fellows, who come from other institutions for the semester; visiting lecturers; and the Mellon fellow, who stays at the Center for the whole year, teaching one course during that time. Each semester the series has a theme, such as Cultural Constructions of the State, Utopia and Apocalypse, Discourses of Childhood and Youth, Culture and the Market, and, this semester, Producing the Past. Although the Center's cultural studies focus does mean that very few scientists speak, it is otherwise resolutely interdisciplinary. Last semester, for instance, speakers came from English, history, anthropology, psychology, art history, astronomy, economics, and religious studies departments.

So why, aside from the aforementioned brownnosing, would a student want to attend these lectures? Well, I think I've learned something from them (which is good, since it's a pretty time-intensive way to get minimal brownnosing value). I mean, I've not only heard lectures by several of the Wesleyan profs most likely to appear in bathroom graffiti, I've heard Frances Fox Piven, Paul Gilroy, Andrew Ross, John Guillory, and Paula Fass. And that doesn't even start on the really smart people you've never heard of.

I don't mean that I've become an expert on the subject of any of the

lectures I've been to. I remember, for instance, very few of the particulars of "Tales of Molestation: The Narrative Production of Endangered Children" or "Capital, Punishment, and the State." I have, however, gotten a sense of the ways that people from different disciplines might approach the same topic and of the incredible range of subjects that can be productively studied. This has informed just about every class I've taken at Wesleyan (though I'll admit that this might be less true if I were a physics major). If critical thinking is what we're supposed to be learning here, I can't think of a better way to supplement your classes than to go to Center for the Humanities lectures (other than to read more than any of us want to think about). It's easy to get more out of a class when you've seen the kind of intellectual work that professors do outside of class or when you've seen a lecture that sounded just fine to you be trashed in the question period. That, to me, is worth an hour and a half a week.

Two of the faculty fellows have already given their lectures this semester, but Andrew Szegedy-Maszak and Ann-Louise Shapiro will both be speaking after spring break. In addition, Anne McClintock, author of *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (a good book with some truly excellent chapters) is coming. ☀

Center For the Humanities lectures

February 24	Svetlana Boym Nostalgia and Post-Communist Memorials.
March 3	Grazia Lolla Finds, Forgeries and the Rewriting of the Past: The Rowley Controversy
March 24	Andrew Szegedy-Maszak Dazzling Whiteness
March 31	Cameron McFarlane A Restoration of Desires: Producing a Gay Past
April 7	Anton Kaes Weimar Cinema and the Trauma of World War I
April 14	Anne McClintock Colonialism, Time, and Madness
April 21	Arjun Appadurai Public Fear and the Clash of Civilizations
April 28	Ann-Louise Shapiro Writing the History of World War I

Center for the Humanities lectures are Monday nights at 8 in Russell House



ACTIVISM

"Dice the onions, crush the garlic, and smash the state"
—Utah Food Not Bombs web page

FOOD NOT BOMBS

7-BEAN SOUP INVADES MIDDLETOWN

BY SARAH WILKES

It's 11:30 on a Sunday morning on the North end of Middletown's Main Street. Church services are ending, and people are trickling onto the sidewalk. Some might be

homeless, some might not be. Some may have a full fridge waiting for them

at home, others might not. It doesn't matter; some of them are hungry, and the spaghetti and garlic bread offered by Food Not Bombs hits the spot.

The Middletown chapter of Food Not Bombs was organized last November by Krista Hansen, a member of Wesleyan Peace Action, SaraT Mayer, Chuck Legere, and a handful of other Wesleyan students and Middletown and Meriden residents. Krista, along with WPA, had attended the protest rally outside the October presidential debates in Hartford, where she encountered some Food Not Bombs volunteers offering her day-old bagels. The Hartford FNB people and the leaflets they passed out inspired her to try to start a group in Middletown.

Food Not Bombs, besides the simple pledge to feed the hungry, is dedicated to promoting a vegan diet. All FNB chapters strive to serve balanced vegan meals, though they often must settle for vegetarian, depend-

ing on what their food donors can offer. A current favorite recipe of FNB Middletown is a seven-bean soup.

Nationally, FNB has a colorful 17-year history. Born May 24, 1980, at an anti-nuke protest in New Hampshire, FNB groups nationwide continue to dedicate themselves to feeding the hungry and the politically active, even when that means police harassment. The first official chapter was founded by Keith McHenry in Cambridge, Mass., in 1980. McHenry later moved to San Francisco, founded a chapter there, and continues to be the informal head of FNB today. The San Francisco

Chapter has experienced over 1,000 arrests since its inception, mostly stemming from a 1990 San Francisco Park Commission ordinance prohibiting the distribution of free food on city park property. Reports abound of lifelong pacifists arrested for "assaulting" police officers after resisting arrest simply so they could continue passing out soup. San

In some cities, lifelong pacifists have been jailed for trying to "resist arrest" so they could continue passing out soup.

San Francisco Food Not Bombs Charter

19 September, 1993

Francisco seems to maintain an "out of sight, out of mind" policy toward dealing with its homeless, and as a group that brings the homeless problem into view in public places, FNB has suffered from this policy.

In contrast, Middletown, like most FNB chapters, has experienced no police interference. Krista noted, "In general, we're small

Food Not Bombs is a 100% organic vegetarian food service group committed to social progress and non-violent civil disobedience. FNB is dedicated to raising public awareness of homeless and poverty issues from housing to health. We feel and have demonstrated that a number of city issues have been unjustly blamed on convenient scapegoats such as the poor, African-Americans, Latinos, and the young underemployed. There is a tremendous need for people to discuss ways to elevate the status of the lowest among us so that we can all be liberated, for our liberation is woven inextricably to the liberation of all.

enough that the police have better things to do," though she acknowledged there might be something in the law books restricting such activity as passing out food without a permit.

Food Not Bombs Middletown starts its weekly operation on Friday, when SaraT Mayer picks up unsalable food from It's Only Natural and Ortez groceries on Main Street. She brings the food to 69 High Street, FNB Middletown's current headquarters, where food is stored and beans are soaked until Sunday morning, when some FNB volunteers arrive around 10:00 to cook. Others come at 11:30 to pick up the food, take it to Main Street, and return at 1:00 with empty pots and bags. Right now FNB Middletown is mostly dependent on Wesleyan student volunteers, but Krista, SaraT, and other 69 High residents hope the group will expand more into the greater Middletown community to avoid such problems as having no food handouts during Wesleyan's winter break, and to change FNB from a mostly campus activity to a citywide community service.

In addition to the food donated by ION and Ortez, FNB Middletown occasionally runs point drives outside WesShop, asking students with extra points to bulk order food for FNB.

Don, a Meriden resident and student at Middlesex Community College, has worked with various Food Not Bombs groups in Connecticut for about three and a half years. He helped FNB Middletown get started, adding his experience and, more important, his enthusiasm to the mix on Main Street. Don is attracted to FNB by the very features which set it apart from soup kitchens and other free food programs: As a vegetarian, he admires FNB's promotion of veganism; even more so, as a social animal, Don takes advantage of the simple human interaction involved in FNB activity. "Just being able to bring a smile to the face of someone down on their luck...I've met a lot of nice people that way. It's self-gratifying." Don's heart lies mostly in the "Food" and less in the "Not Bombs," simply

because FNB's primary goal of feeding the hungry by salvaging would-be wasted food is more down-to-earth, offering immediate, visible results.

Don's attitude seems reflective of FNB's position in general: While FNB volunteers nationwide distribute flyers pronouncing, "the money spent by the world on weapons in one week is enough to feed all the people on Earth for a year," the group does little in the political arena to get politicians to cut military spending. Most of FNB's energy is spent at the grassroots level, getting the food to the hungry and the message to the general public.

F N B



Middletown has yet to table at a political rally or stage an anti-military protest on their own, though Krista and others hope to do so soon.

Until then, Food Not Bombs Middletown can look forward to the simpler goal of getting the hungry fed and the wasted food spared every Sunday. ☺

For more information on Food Not Bombs Middletown, or if you would like to participate, call Krista Hanson at (860)685-6035. Also, check out FNB San Francisco's website at <http://www.webcom.com/~peace/PEACETREE/stuff/stuff/HOME PAGE.html>.

Beyond Shutdown

THE NUCLEAR INDUSTRY STILL SUCKS

BY LIVIA GERSHON

On December 4, 1996, Northeast Utility's Connecticut Yankee nuclear power plant in Haddam Neck was officially closed forever. Activists who had been fighting the plant for years celebrated, but nonetheless resumed the fight.

Across the US, and in many European countries, it is becoming obvious that nuclear power will never be safe or as cheap as other power sources; many plants are being shut down prematurely while almost no new ones are being built. But opponents of nuclear reactors are discovering that the fight against radioactive contamination is far from over when a plant shuts down. Decommissioning involves figuring out what to do with the high- and low-level waste that has been

accumulating for decades. Plant operators often want to get the process over with as quickly and cheaply as possible without interference from the public.

Anti-nuclear activists often find that reactor operators are supported in their hasty decommissioning plans—as in running plants without following regulations—by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), the federal agency that is supposed to be regulating them. Many critics claim that since its creation in 1974, the NRC has never done its official job of regulating the use of nuclear power. Instead, they say, the NRC has often been an apologist for nuclear utilities. Even chair of the NRC Shirley Jackson has acknowledged that the Commission has at times been too cozy with the industry. Last March, *Time* magazine ran a front page story on plant employees who had to stand up to both the utility and the regulator to demand that plants obey regulations.

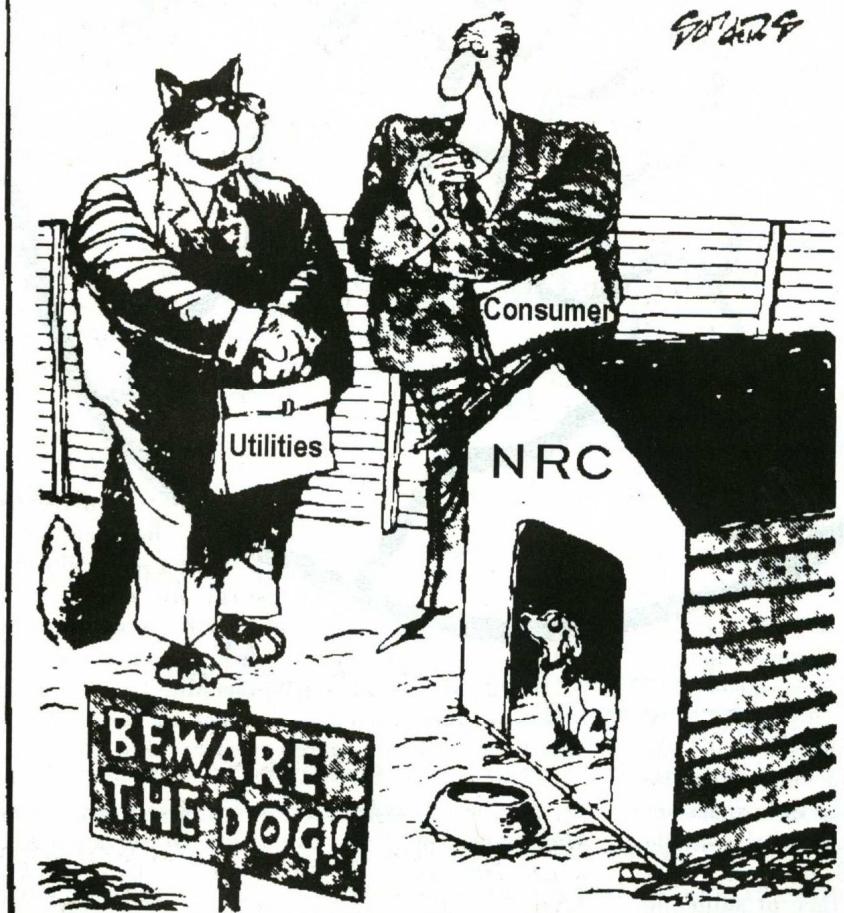
One reason contributing to the lax enforcement of regulations is that after leaving the Commission, many NRC officials go to work for the companies they had regulated, creating a “revolving door” that encourages the two parties to work closely together.

In Rowe, Massachusetts, the anti-nuclear group Citizen's Awareness Network (CAN) has been fighting since 1992 to have a say in the decommissioning of the local Yankee Rowe plant. The group, which operates out of its members' homes and has no paid staff, sees the operating utility and the NRC as a united force that supports quick, dirty solutions over cleaner but more difficult ones.

After shutting down the reactor in 1992, the utility began removing and shipping low-level waste before the NRC approved a decommissioning plan. The NRC never intervened. In 1995, after being refused a public hearing, CAN sued the NRC in an appellate court. The court ruled for CAN and called NRC's behavior “arbitrary, capricious, and utterly irrational.”

On the same day that CAN

"Frankly, I don't see anything wrong with the watchdog you've got."



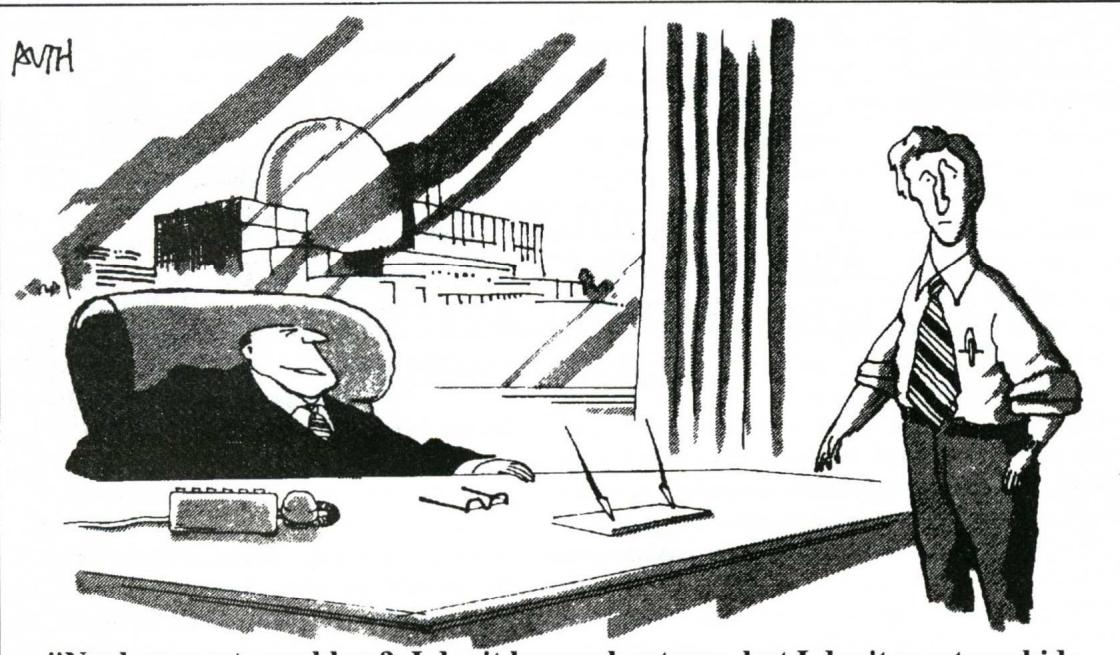
by Bill Sanders, reprinted from Field Newspaper Syndicate

won in court, the NRC came out with a new Draft Rule on Decommissioning which, according to CAN's attorney John Block, "completely shut out public participation, closed the door completely." According to CAN members, the passage of this new rule essentially legalized what the NRC had been doing all along—and took away CAN's right to a public hearing. But CAN did gain access to Commission reports which demonstrated that worker exposure levels had been underestimated

been sitting around looking at the stars while the licensees regulate themselves. And now for the decommissioning their new rule says you can continue to just regulate yourselves and just take it apart. It's nothing taking apart a reactor. It's nothing getting rid of 25, 30 years of accumulated waste."

The dangers of decommissioning are especially significant since Northeast Utilities has apparently decided to use the rapid decommissioning (DECON)

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"Nuclear waste problem? I don't know about you, but I don't want my kids growing up in a world where there aren't any problems left to solve!"

in previous studies. It has been five years since CAN began their work on the decommissioning of Rowe, and they are still fighting against the same activities that were flagrantly in violation of NRC regulations in 1992.

"They're not following their regulations," said Deborah Katz of CAN, "And then when they're caught at not following their recommendations and they're reprimanded by the court, what the NRC does is changes their regulations."

Meanwhile, back in Haddam, the Connecticut chapter of Citizen's Awareness Network believes it is facing a replay of Rowe. During its 28-year on-line life, the reactor's operations have never been properly documented, and safety features have been mismanaged and neglected. Officials have consistently failed to complete Final Safety Analysis Reports, which are crucial for making decisions about continued operations and for beginning the decommissioning process. With so much documentation missing, decommissioning would be haphazard and could pose a significant threat to workers and the public.

According to Block, the NRC "issued a set of regulations designed to control the most lethal substances on the face of the planet and for 28 years has

method to remove radioactive materials from Haddam as quickly as possible. It would then ship the low-level waste to a landfill in Barnwell, South Carolina which is known to be leaking into the area's groundwater. This dump would be illegal in Connecticut because of its safety problems.

The alternative decommissioning method advocated by CAN (and the only other available option, according to NRC regulations) is called SAFSTOR. This process would delay dismantling for thirty years, and, according to NRC studies, expose workers to an order of magnitude more radiation than DECON. CAN argues that the delay would allow for time to study nuclear issues and develop better cleanup technology. This method may actually be more cost-effective in the long run, but the studies necessary to determine whether this is the case will never be made if NRC allows the utility to rush through the decommissioning process.

Right now it is difficult to believe that the NRC will voluntarily stop the process. Judging from the Commission's past behavior, it would probably require forceful action on the part of anti-nuclear forces.

Cleaning out the Closet

B Y A O N G U S B U R K E

Every once in a while an issue emerges that showcases how different groups in America view the world in fundamentally different ways. The racially polarized response to the O.J. Simpson trial, for example, showed how faith in the criminal justice system diverges so radically for blacks and whites. Until recently, I assumed that outing, the unwelcomed public revelation of a gay person's sexuality, was an issue that similarly divided straights and gays. The vast majority of heterosexuals are strongly opposed to the practice, which they believe is a clear violation of a person's basic right to privacy. Many straight people, I suppose, assume that outing is simply the manifestation of an overanxious community's desires to recruit new members — and if a few straight people get wrongfully outed in the process, well hey, now they'll be forced to join our team since no one of the opposite sex will talk with them anymore anyway.

While it's not likely that many gay people would endorse that depiction of outing, it may come as a surprise to you to know that the vast majority of gays are opposed to outing under most conditions. According to a poll published in the January 21, 1997 issue of *The Advocate*, 28% of polled readers believe that outing is never justified, and additional 47% believed that outing is justified only when a public figure has acted "hypocritically." Only 6% percent of those polled believe that outing is always justified.

In a sense, it shouldn't be all that surprising that gay people would generally be opposed to outing — they are the ones who are most aware of the costs of disclosure of one's sexual orientation and the protections the closet offers. But to the proponents of outing, the privacy of the closet is not a right, but a sham. Straight people, after all, don't typically demand their right to privacy when it comes to their sexual orientation. They freely discuss their relationships and desires with even fairly casual acquaintances. By contrast, most gay people remain closeted or semi-closeted, not out of some natural preference for being discrete about their personal affairs, but out of fear of stigmatization or something more tangible — like getting fired or a fist to the jaw.

Outing's proponents claim that increasing gay visibility is the only way to change the social mores that make homosexuality a thing to be ashamed of. As Victoria A. Brownworth has stated:

[P]articipating in outing makes the statement that anyone can be gay and that as a group we can accept that. That's a major leap toward self-love and independence. And quite simply, until we believe and act like we are worthy of the same legal protections, rights and privileges awarded to the heterosexual society, we won't achieve them.

Manyouters go so far as to say that staying in the closet is an act of selfishness. Brownworth charges that "every gay man and lesbian woman who 'passes'

(or tries) to oppresses me further and reaps the benefits of my activism while hiding the strength of our numbers from the people to whom those numbers would make a difference."

Others believe that celebrities and other powerful people — those who are less in need of the protection the closet offers — are obliged to come out, be role models for the gay community, and use their influence to confront homophobia. Michaelangelo Signorile, probably the most famous proponent of outing in America today, made this point when he outed David Geffen, former owner of Geffen records, in the now-defunct *OutWeek* magazine in 1990:

WHY CAN'T GEFFEN TAKE ONE FUCKING MINUTE OUT OF HIS GREEDY, SELF-SERVING LIFE AND THINK ABOUT THE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE BEING BLUDGEONED TO DEATH OR DYING IN HOSPITALS AND HOW THEY NEED SOMEONE AS POWERFUL AS HIM TO CONFRONT THIS MESS?!

To me, there is something urgently compelling about these arguments for outing, especially when issues of life and death are at stake. Signorile's words, of course, bring the topic of AIDS in to the realm of discourse surround outing. Who knows how many people, gay and straight, have and will continue to suffer and die of AIDS needlessly because of homophobia? Who knows what impact increased gay visibility could have on such figures?

On the other hand, it's not clear how beneficial a part outing could play (or has played) in increasing gay visibility. After all, does outing really do anything to increase self-esteem among gays? Do ousted people make good role models for the gay community? Does outing have a favorable impact on straight people's perceptions of the gay community? If anything,

IN DEFENSE OF OUTING (SOMETIMES)



Ellen DeGeneres

outing's non-voluntary nature reinforces the idea that homosexuality is something to be ashamed of (of course, if the threat of outing forces people to come out of the closet on their own and in a more positive manner...)

Ultimately, however, I suspect that these "greater good" arguments for outing will not resonate with most people for a different reason. Outing violates some basic moral principles that most

of us agree on. Many of the arguments for outing often come across as elitist ("I know what's best for you, my closeted friend") or vindictive (i.e., any number of Signorile's outings). More generally, it is a basic constitutional theme that Americans must often be willing to forego a greater public good in order to protect individual rights. While outing is rarely if ever a legal question (the argument is not about whether the government ought to have the power to out people), constitutional principles such as this one have largely diffused into our private morality.

But another constitutional principle, that all people should be treated equal, is the foundation for another school of thought on outing. Proponents of "equalization" argue that outing is justifiable only when the mainstream press has made an active attempt not to reveal a public figure's sexuality solely because that sexuality is gay. Outing motivated by the philosophy of "equalization" tends to be limited to just two types of cases: 1) tabloid-style reporting of the same-sex liaisons of celebrities, and 2) exposing hypocrisy.

One often hears debates about how far the news media ought to pry into the lives of politicians and other public figures. Many believe that it is appropriate for reporters to uncover stories of politicians who do not practice what they preach. Newt Gingrich, for example, has been exposed for rising to power by proclaiming a commitment to family values even though he left his first wife while she was dealing with cancer-related illnesses.

Proponents of equalization advocate the outing of closeted politicians who have worked to undermine advances in gay rights. For example, congressional representatives Mark Foley of Florida and Jim Kolbe of Arizona were ousted last year when it was learned that they intended to vote for the homophobic Defense of Marriage Act.

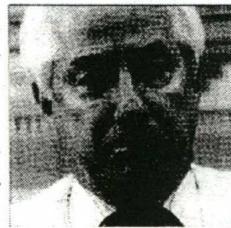
Then there are tabloid-type outings. One might contend that tabloid reporting of celebrities in general is invasive and repugnant. But few go so far

as to claim that tabloid reporting as an industry is morally unjustifiable, at least not with the same vigor as many protest outing. If one is not willing to take on the industry of tabloid reporting as a whole, then a commitment to treating gays and straights equally demands that one support outing under certain circumstances. For example, when *New York* magazine reported that television star Ellen DeGeneres was spotted in a Manhattan bar kissing a woman, it started a controversy in the mainstream press about the distinction between "celebrity reporting" and "outing." From the perspective of the proponents of equalization, there is no distinction.

There is a considerable amount of evidence that suggests that many tabloids and well known gossip reporters have actively conspired to keep celebrities such as Rock Hudson, Malcolm Forbes, Jodie Foster, and Richard Chamberlain closeted to the public, with some stories going so far as "reporting" fictional tales of opposite-sex romances. One might claim that such reporters are simply trying to protect the careers of such celebrities. Get real. When information leaked about Charlie Sheen and the Heidi Fleiss sex-scandal, the tabloids jumped on the story and Sheen's career has suffered since. The tabloids had a field day when PeeWee Herman was arrested for masturbating in a Florida porno theatre. Where's PeeWee now? Reporters don't care, because it's not their responsibility. Tabloids have a history of suppressing information about the homosexuality of public figures, howev-

er, only because some reporters feel that it is a concealable source of shame for what may otherwise be a charming celebrity.

Well, it shouldn't be a source of shame. Being gay is not a character flaw. It's nothing more complex than what gets you aroused. When the mainstream press treats it as something else, the gay press has a responsibility to act to counter what amounts to an attack on gay people. This just doesn't involve outing people who the mainstream press has kept closeted. It may involve the opposite, such as challenging the mainstream press for outing Cher's daughter Chastity (would it have been news, even tabloid news, if Chastity had been "spotted" dating a guy?). Outing, when properly done, is just a small part of the larger project of achieving equal status for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in a currently homophobic society.



Rep. Jim Kolbe



Michaelangelo Signorile

BETTER OFF RED

Why I'm a Communist

BY DANIEL DYLAN YOUNG

I have always found the idea of communism very interesting. However, until recently I had never given it much more thought than any other American. I have seen the horror of its real totalitarian offspring in Russia and China, and have also seen the beauty of the ideals upheld in American folk music and other art inspired by the call, "Workingmen of the world, unite!" I saw the positive and negative concepts that sprang from Marx's ideas, and became ambivalent to the issue of communism versus capitalism to a certain extent.

My misunderstanding of the basic tenets of communism (no doubt based on hearing too many ex-hippy stories of life on the commune) had led me to believe that communist ideas were probably doomed to failure because they required a waiving of rights to all legal private property — leaving only individual morals to keep one man from using another's car or power tools. I also had a completely confused idea of the identity of the so-called bourgeoisie whom commun-

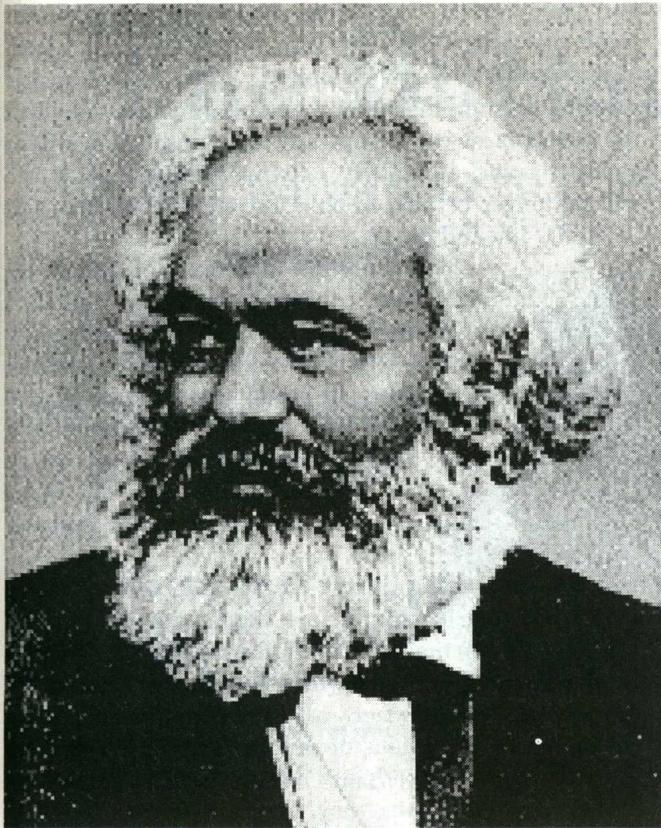
nists were sworn to fight against. I associated them with the middle class, usually the upper-middle class: those who live in relative luxury compared to the minimum wage worker. This definition was a problem because I am a member of the American middle class myself, and because I could see little that was truly threatening (though some things which were truly pathetic) in the Volvo-driving, loafer wearing upper middle class pseudo-yuppies that I saw around me — with my definitions confused, I therefore could not bring myself to hold in my heart frightened hatred for the bourgeoisie. These misunderstandings combined with my observations of the overwhelmingly capitalist nature of the modern world and the abysmal failures under the belt of communism to make me think that there was nothing intrinsically wrong with capitalism, and that safeguards just needed to be better enforced to keep the big players of the game from abusing the smaller ones.

But, to put it plainly, I have seen the light. How did I see the light? Well it began when, on a lark, I borrowed from a friend of mine an extremely entertaining 150-page cartoon book called *Marx For*

All human time is worth the same amount -- any human being could be curing cancer, writing symphonies or sweeping the streets at any given time.

Beginners. The book was originally written in Spanish by a man named Eduardo del Rio Rius, but an English translation is currently available from Pantheon Books (maybe...I bought a used copy so who knows if it's still in print). This book traces the philosophical roots of Marx's basic ideas, tells his life history, and outlines (with many quotes from the *Manifesto*) his basic communist philosophy. On finishing this book, and having my mind blown, I went on to read through *The Communist Manifesto*. And through this brief educa-





tion in communism, there were two main ideas which were extremely important in clearing up my misunderstandings and apprehensions about communism. They also revolutionized my view of capitalism.

First, as I had mistakenly and rather naively thought, Marx's communism is *not* about everyone sharing each other's car or power tools (although it is about sharing each other's tools of power...). As Marx states in *The Communist Manifesto*, "Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labor of others by means of such appropriation...We [the Communists] by no means intend to abolish [the] personal appropriation of the products of labor, an appropriation that is made for the maintenance and reproduction of human life, and that leaves no surplus where with to command the labor of another." So, in case you were a bit confused (like me), Marx's communism is not really a philosophy in which all private property (in the broad sense that modern Americans use the term private property) is abolished. All your cars, TV sets, Nintendos, personal computers, souvenirs, family heirlooms (all the minor luxuries which were out of reach for the majority of the working class in Marx's time, though things have changed a little these days) and anything else which you use for individual pleasure or survival will remain yours under communism. So what *will* be collectivized? What is this private property that would be abolished under Marx's prescription for utopia? Simply any piece of property which you would utilize (in conjunction with the labor power of others' whom you employed) in order to create items meant for trade

with others. This means basically two sets of property: raw materials for production and tools for production. Under the current capitalist system these tools and raw materials are owned by a very small group of the world population: entrepreneur owners and stockholders of private corporations. Many of these owners do absolutely no work. Entrepreneurs may actually do a

Marx's communism is *not* about everyone sharing each other's car or power tools (although it is about sharing each other's tools of power).

great deal of organization work, but stockholders do almost nothing. But both of these groups profit enormously from selling products which other people's work creates. The money they take in is exponentially greater than the wages of any of the people who are actually responsible for creating something with these tools and resources. And they have not even done as much work as a single one of these laborers!

There are two main problems (one of them moral, one of them practical) which Marx, I, and many other people, have with this capitalist idea of private ownership of resources and tools of production. On moral grounds, why should entrepreneurs or stockholders profit more than workers or management? Apologists for capitalism claim that it is this ability to come up with/gamble on a new idea that justifies these people profiting more than those who simply jump on

...this class which owns the means of production but does no work are leeching off of society and driving up prices so that economic survival becomes more difficult for others. Marx dubbed these leeches the "bourgeoisie."

the bandwagon to work for them. I don't buy this. After thinking for a great while I came to the idea, which I see as an ultimate truth, that no job should get a different wage from any other job. All human time is



worth the same amount — any human being could be curing cancer, writing symphonies or sweeping the streets at any given time. All these things need to get done. To pay someone less for one job than the other is to make the judgement that one job isn't absolutely necessary...and if a job doesn't really need to get done then *it should be eliminated*. However, jobs that aren't

When enough people come to acknowledge how wasteful, immoral and unfair the precepts of capitalism are, then capitalism will be exposed as just a big, silly, extremely childish game.

truly necessary (superfluous supervisors, positions created for relatives etc.) aren't usually the ones that pay the least.

The second problem with the high profits of entrepreneurs and stockholders — which Marx is much more concerned with than my little philosophical issue of human time — is that this class who owns the means of production but does no work is leeching off of society and driving up prices so that economic survival becomes more difficult for others. Marx dubbed these leeches "the bourgeoisie." Thus Marx's definition of the bourgeoisie is those who own the means of production (resources and tools) and buy others' labor power in order to profit. How do they leech off of workers? Well clearly, entrepreneurs and stockbrokers cannot allow their companies to sell products for prices approximately equal to the amount of work plus the amount of resources that went into them. Otherwise how would they make any money for themselves? So in order that the bourgeoisie allow the means of production to be utilized, the sale price of finished products must be set above the cost of labor and resources. In this way the prices of food, clothes and everything else go up, up, up for everyone, even though the wages of non-bourgeoisie workers (dubbed by Marx "the proletariat") do not go up, and frequently go down, as profits increase. And in the modern marketplace prices are often driven up unbelievably higher than the price of labor and resources.

I can no longer believe that it is perfectly okay for the human world to be driven by stock market trends, or for the bourgeoisie (and by this I mean *any* class or person who privately owns the means of production) to exist. Period. This system is based on an immoral, inequalitarian idea — the idea that some people should be allowed to own the tools of production

and exploit others. Even if the ownership switches hands frequently, that still means that someone is being a leech and someone is being exploited. When enough people come to acknowledge how wasteful, immoral and unfair the precepts of capitalism are, then capitalism will be exposed as just a big, silly, extremely childish game, and will no longer be able to hold any supreme powers over life and death.

I don't know exactly what other economic system I would want to see capitalism replaced with, but I see a few major, intriguing possibilities: (1) a socialist economy where only the means of production for necessities of life are owned and managed collectively by a democratic government and priced strictly based upon resource/labor costs, but where capitalists are still allowed to continue to play their silly little game with the production of luxury products; (2) full, all out, hardcore communism, where legal ownership of all means of production is put into the hands of a democratically-elected government; or (3) some kind of anarcho-syndicalist system where all individuals would share ownership in the means of production of the particular industry they worked for. All of these systems have drawbacks, but to me they have all become infinitely more acceptable choices than capitalism.

Well have I convinced ya? I've skipped over a couple major problems with capitalism, such as the negative, alienating effects which not sharing in ownership

Capitalism is based on an immoral, inequalitarian idea—the idea that some people should be allowed to own the tools of production and exploit others.

of the means of production and simply hawking your labor-power to the highest payer has had on American and human society. So if you want to know more I suggest going out and reading about these things yourself. Pick up *The Communist Manifesto*, pick up *Das Kapital*, pick up Mao's little red book, search high and low for your own copy of *Marx For Beginners*. Think about these things, and talk about them with others. Talk about them with me, I'd love it. In fact, I plan to start a campus group for discussing and acting on socialist and communist idea(l)s. Remember, if you don't own the means of production, you're getting exploited. Have a nice day.



The Buttonwood Tree

MIDDLETOWN'S LITTLE BOOKSTORE THAT COULD

Interview by

The Buttonwood Tree is a performing arts center and used bookstore at 605 Main Street, right next to Saint Vincent DePaul's Soup Kitchen. This February is its first month of regular hours since a fire gutted its old building on Rapallo Ave in the spring of 1995. I talked with The Buttonwood's founder, Susan Allison, and her husband, Stephan Allison, about the brief but exciting history of the Buttonwood Tree.

How did the Buttonwood Tree start?

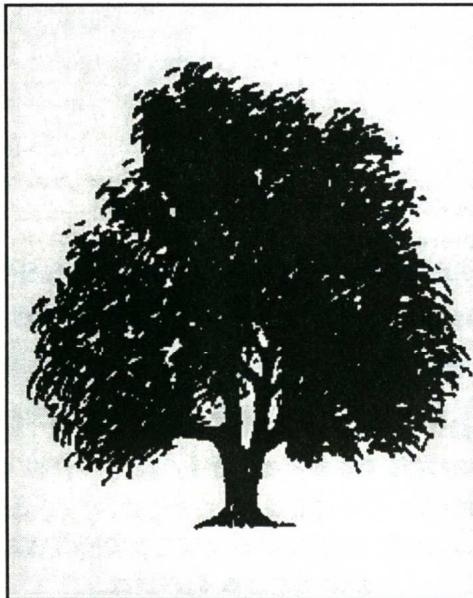
Susan: The Buttonwood Tree came out of Ibis Books. I opened the bookstore in December of '89 on Rapallo Avenue. I had a gallery in there and began holding poetry readings pretty much right away in the first week. And those took off really well. A space for that kind of thing was really lacking in Middletown.

What made you want to open a used bookstore?

Susan: I had worked in used and rare bookstores since I had graduated and I found that that's where my interests really were. I always had ideas while working in other people's bookstores that we should have readings and entertainment and turn it into a more interactive place, but I couldn't convince any of the book dealers I worked for.

Why did you start Ibis in the North End of Middletown?

Susan: My father's family is from Middletown, so we used to vacation to my uncle's farm here in Middletown during the summers. Then I came to



Trevor Griffey

Wesleyan in 1979. I left three times but kept coming back and eventually graduated. I do like Middletown. It's a neat little place, and while I've wandered, I like being rooted here.

And it seemed like Middletown would be interested in Ibis?

Susan: I felt it would work when others said it wouldn't was because I knew the area. Stephan and I both used to bartend in a bar around here and I knew a lot of the people around here. You know, it's hard to explain and I feel like I've explained it many times to many people, but when you get a vision, and you get an idea, and you just know something's going to work.

When did you come in, Stephan?

Stephan: In 1990.

Susan: And he was one of the people that said "Susie, this is crazy."

How did it go from Ibis to the Buttonwood Tree?

Stephan: Susie was contacted by the Middletown Commission on the Arts and they talked with her about becoming a non-profit arts organization. And Susie came home and said, "this is an idea." And my feeling was, let's just forget the whole thing. It was a strain on me in terms of wondering every day about how things were going to go and I was concerned about hopping from one frying pan to another. But of course, Susie prevailed because she usually does. So it was Susie's decision to go ahead and become a non-profit arts organization, and to do that, she needed a Board, it needed to be incorporated, and there was a lot of paper work. And as she mentioned to you earlier, she has no business sense whatsoever.

Susan: Did I mention that?

Stephan: Well, she doesn't do things in the traditional business way—documenting and keeping records etc.—and somebody had to do that so I got involved.

It's basically Susie's creative side and I'm just the paperwork side.

And so the reaction to your work was immediately positive?

Susan: Ibis' first year was successful in terms of book selling but the bookstore was financing this whole art center. It was paying for the rent, but those were some tough years. As a family of three, we were living under the poverty level for one person. But it was exciting.

Stephan: And then, of course, we started the Buttonwood Tree, which is even more harrowing because you have to rely on being able to sell your concept to people who—

Susan: —who don't like you.

Stephan: Or people who don't know you. We had to go to the city and get support. We had to have individual donors which are very hard to get before you have any track record. And fortunately, the city helped us. It wasn't as much as we had hoped for but it was enough to continue and to survive, and I think it's always just been a question of survival so you take what you can and you work with it. And we've done that. I think that one of the best things that happened to us is the fire in our old space because people realized that they wanted us to be there and I think we gained more support since that fire than we had been able to gain. It has in a way helped us.

Susan: And it's easier to say that now that it's over.

What happened with the fire?

Stephan: Suspected arson in an apartment upstairs about a year and a half ago.

Susan: It could have been against someone upstairs, but it also could have been one of those gang rite things in Connecticut but it's all speculation. To get into a gang, you sometimes have to set a back porch on fire.

Stephan: So the place is condemned.

Susan: We got four hours of six fire trucks pouring water onto the fire. Most of our insurance covered things that weren't damaged. Then we got a community development block grant to redo the building we relocated to.

Stephan: But that wasn't enough to cover the costs. We had to supplement that. We had great support from individuals in our fund raising drive. We were supported generally by some foundations as well. More people became aware of what we were doing and wanted to make sure we stayed.

Susan: During those nineteen months we got letters, someone would knock on the door and hand us a check with a little letter saying "we miss the Buttonwood Tree." So it seemed like every time we came close to giving up—because Stephan was injured for a while and we were miserable in this stinking sucking rut—

Stephan: —Someone would come around and make this gesture that made it impossible to quit. There's a lot of joy in this place, and that's what keeps us going, though we forget that sometimes during nineteen

month lapses. But we didn't give up. During that time between places we had performances at borrowed venues and had an all day summer music and arts festival.

"I think that one of the best things that happened to us is the fire in our old space because people realized that they wanted us to be there"

—Stephan Allison

Do you have jobs other than your work for the Buttonwood Tree?

Stephan: I do some graphic design on the side to supplement our income, since we need more money than what we get from the Buttonwood Tree. Once in a while, Susie has a part time job but she's an unpaid worker here. I'm the only paid person, but of course it's not enough to get by. Hopefully, we'll have enough time to write the grants and get them approved that we can increase the salary covered benefits—no one in the family has health benefits since we can't afford it—and hopefully pay Susie for the work she's doing. We've been doing this for six years so we'll just keep doing it because it's worth it 'til I get ill and then I'm going to be angry at myself.

Do you have a focus about acts you try to bring to the Buttonwood Tree?

Stephan: We've always had a focus: local, under-served—

What do you mean by under-served?

Stephan: Artists who don't have a lot of opportunity in the way of venues but who none the less do have a following and are very good at what they're doing. Something out of the mainstream. There has to be a place where people start. You have to have a place, a venue for beginning artists looking for exposure.

We also provide a venue for the avant garde. For example, we often have what we call expansion jazz. It's got its roots in older forms of jazz but it expands out of them. We provide that because there aren't a lot of places where that kind of thing can happen outside of major cities. We are also a space for performers who come from outside the US who need a venue for some place between New York and Boston and it might be during the week or even a weekend.

Who comes to the Buttonwood Tree?

Stephan: There's no real homogeneous group. There are a lot of people, all different ages. One of the things I think we realized because we were operating in

the North End is that in the city of Middletown, the North End is perceived as dangerous. So for us to try to get the support we need, we knew we weren't going to get it from Middletown right away. We had to show the people in Middletown that it's a safe place by

"During those nineteen months we got letters, someone would knock on the door and hand us a check with a little letter saying 'we miss the Buttonwood Tree.'"

—Susan Allison, founder

What is the Buttonwood Tree?

by Susan Allison, founder.

Single Definitions never satisfy everyone, so I'll give you a few. The Buttonwood Tree is...

1. A place where the free exchange of ideas is encouraged, especially through artistic expression.
2. Not a socalled university, a Social Service Agency, a social club, a front for neo-quazi-communist revolutionaries or a grocery store.
3. a 501- (c)(3)
4. an inlet and outlet, a port, for wandering, touring and local folks who are interested in arts of all brow-levels (high brow, low brow etc...)
5. like a tree, simply, where people gather to tell stories, play music together, tap, rap, celebrate, show-off, sit, compare lies...
6. a small non-profit Community based Center for the Arts in Middletown, CT.
7. a haunted book shop where the books speak.
8. the place where the magic piano sits in the old Arigoni Ballroom.
9. a safe place for families and creativity.
10. A place which respects celebration but which finds endless celebration a bore.
11. a place where the "chain of command" is regular-

bringing people from outside Middletown who didn't have this negative perception. Two thirds of our supporters come from outside Middletown, and they always have. The past year, it's shifted a bit: 40/60 Middletown to non-Middletown residents.

Susan: Someone once asked me who comes to the Buttonwood Tree and I said, "brave people." It's not color, socioeconomic background, or degree of academic achievement, but really the brave and the curious. It's people who will say, "hmmm, what's that? What's going on in there?"

If you're a brave person who would like more information about the Buttonwood Tree, including calendars

of upcoming events, call 347-4957 or check out its web page at <http://www.buttonwood.org>. If you're interested in performing at the Buttonwood Tree, stop by to talk to Susan or Stephan Allison during its business hours. It's open 11am-4pm and 7pm -10pm during the week.



ly ignored.

12. ... I have no idea.

The Buttonwood Tree has also been referred to as...

"The doomed to fail bookstore"
 "a cat house"
 "that nigger-loving bookstore"
 "that lesbian shop"
 "seance shop"
 "a bourgeois art shop"
 "the hippie store"

My first encounter with our city government was a council meeting. One of the City Fathers asked:

"What do you sell in there?"
 "In my bookstore? I sell books."
 "Yeah, we know what you sell."

The Buttonwood Tree has also been called...

"The best place in the world to hear music" — Ted Reichman
 "The most intimate room I've ever been in anywhere in the world." — Patron
 "A quiet hole in the wall in a racially diverse, middle class neighborhood." — New York Times
 "A book junkie's mini paradise" — Hartford Courant

HERMES INDEX

(With apologies to *Harper's Magazine*)

1. Weight disparity, in percent, between average woman and average model in 1960: 10
2. Weight disparity, in percent, between average woman and average model in 1996: 25
3. Percent of women that can achieve the body type shared by 80% of models: 5
4. Time in years since the establishment of the first civilian nuclear power plant: 40
5. Approximate length of recorded human history in years: 5,000
6. Radioactive life of plutonium in years: 240,000
7. Cubic feet of radioactive solid wastes produced by atomic power until 1981: 13,000,000
8. Fatal human exposure time to high-level radioactive waste in seconds: 3-5
9. Minimum number of shipments of high-level radioactive waste to be shipped through Connecticut highways if Senate Bill s-104 passes: 1,300
10. Cost of housing an inmate in a Massachusetts prison in dollars: 29,600
11. Approximate cost of keeping a student at Wesleyan per year in dollars: 28,658
12. Cost [adjusted for inflation] of Nancy Reagan's wardrobe for Inauguration day 1980: \$40,000
13. Percentage greater chance of having a heart attack on Monday than any other day of the week: 50
14. Percent of GNP equal to Federal Deficit in 1946: 100
15. Unemployment level in 1946 in percent: less than 4
16. Percent of GNP equal to Federal Deficit in 1992: 4.1
17. Unemployment in 1992: 7.1

Sources: 1-3: Jean Kilborn, "Slim Hopes" video; 5: general knowledge; 6,8,9: Citizen Awareness Network; 7, 12, 14, 15: Mark Green, *Winning Back America*; 10: *Challenge the Lies Campaign Organization Guide* from Center for Campus Organizing; 11: Chris Ilch's Student Accounts bill; 13, 16, 17: *1994 World Almanac and Book of Facts*

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